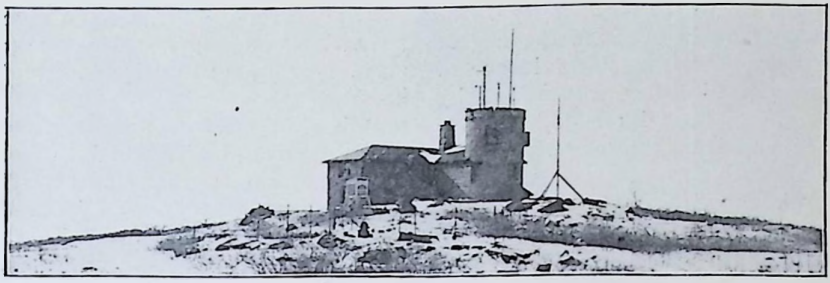
Canton Among the Blue Hills

By Mary Stoyell Stimpson



OBSERVATORY, BLUE HILL

SEVERAL years ago one of our most charming New England writers issued a volume entitled "From Ponkapog to Pesth," and, more recently, there has come from the same pen "Ponkapog Papers." T. B. Aldrich states in his introduction of the one, "Ponkapog is the Indian name of a little New England village which scarcely merits a description"; and in the other, "The little Massachusetts settlement, nestled under the wing of the Blue Hills, has no illusions concerning itself, never mistakes the cackling of the bourg for the sound that echoes round the world, and no more thinks of rivalling great centres of human activity than these slight papers dream of inviting comparison between themselves and important pieces of literature." It would seem the author assumed too little, for his slightest fragment will ever receive "praise and perusal," while Ponkapog, the unpretentious, and Canton, the town corporate, are entrancing bits of historic soil. Moreover, to such as love to trace the beginnings of things, Blue Hills —the old Cheviot Hills of John Smith's Journal—will furnish a creditable list of civic and industrial benefactions which had their origin in this locality.

The Massachusetts tribe of Indians, governed by Chief Chicataubut, were in full and undisputed possession of all the country surrounding Massachusetts Bay when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. A year later the old Sachem signed a treaty with the English agreeing to the occupancy of Dorchester by them. His successors distributed other parcels, so that, when the General Court confirmed the deed of the Indians in 1637, ancient Dorchester was the largest town in New England. Portions of this town were taken at intervals to form others, and in 1726 the South Precinct, containing the modern towns of Stoughton, Sharon and

Canton, with the lands beyond, was incorporated under the name of Stoughton, the name being selected in honor of Lieutenant Governor Stoughton, who was born in Dorchester and who had a distinguished career. A graduate of Harvard and later a Fellow of New College, Oxford, where he received the degree Master of Arts, he left evidence of his interest in things educational by his gift of Stoughton Hall to Harvard and land for school purposes to his native town.

While the white men were making themselves homes and becoming landed proprietors in this section, was hospitably received in the wigwams and who had already succeeded in establishing a "praying town" in Natick. He gathered such of the Massachusetts tribe as had settled near the mouth of the Neponset River and requested "the good people of Dorchester" to give a tract of land whereon they might make permanent settlement and he have opportunity regularly to preach to them. Accordingly the Indian Plantation at Ponkapog, "not exceeding six thousand acres," was granted in 1657, and became "the Second Praying Town." These sons of the forest not only hunted,

HOME OF THE POET T. B. ALDRICH AT PONKAPOG

so richly endowed by nature, the Indians were crowding into more restricted quarters. At this juncture "there came one preaching in the wilderness" to them—that wonderful man, the apostle Eliot, who fished, helped the early settlers build their houses and gather their crops, but the more ambitious learned to prepare shingles and clapboards for the Boston market. Here, in the shadow of the Blue

Hills, John Eliot made the first Indian translation of the Bible—stupendous and eventful achievement. Here, on Sunday mornings, the Red Men, at the roll of the drum, met in the church of their

UNITARIAN CHURCH, PASTOR, PARSONAGE AND VESTRY

own building, and listened reverently to the preaching of the learned man who couched his messages to them in simple language.

From 1726 till the stormy days of the Revolution the history of Stoughton was similar to that of other early colonial towns. Many of the English customs were adhered to. The tithing-man was strict in his Sunday duties; the mortifying stocks must have punished petty offenders, for there is extant a bill for repairing the same by one Preserved Lyon. Quaint old character he, this carpenter of olden days, and his name marvelously well chosen it would seem, for he was yet well preserved when he died at the age of ninety-six, though the town annals gravely inform us that "he was so small on the day of his birth that his parents put him into a quart tankard and shut down the cover." All houses boasted their tankards and decanters. Rum, gin, brandy were on the sideboard, while the careful housewife kept in some safe receptacle, on the high mantel, Abel Puffer's Sure Cure for the Bite of a Rattlesnake. Though the remedy may have long since passed into disuse, the venomous reptiles still haunt this locality.

If the general history of the community was not unique, some of its individual characters were decidedly so. The oldest inhabitants of Canton, from the remembered

stories of their grandsires, will tell you of William Sherman, shoemaker by trade, who became a well-to-do farmer of seventy acres, among whose lineal descendants may be mentioned John A. Logan, Chauncey Depew, Senators Hoar and Evarts, Secretary John Sherman and William Tecumseh Sherman, while his son became one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Roger Sherman learned the trade of his father and it is said that when he left Canton (about the time he attained his majority), he carried his kit on his back and that he wheeled all his worldly possessions in a wheelbarrow. But he lacked neither mental nor moral equipment, and in after years was a man of national importance. Treasurer of Yale College, judge of the Superior Court, member of Congress, he was described by Jefferson as a man who "never said a foolish thing in his life," and John Adams declared that "he was one of the most sensible men in the world, with the clearest head and steadiest heart." He was constant in his affection for his boyhood home and often revisited it. They will linger over the life of Parson Samuel Dunbar, protegée of Cotton Mather, pupil at the Boston Latin School, graduate of Harvard, who, in his long ministry, preached eight thousand and fifty-nine sermons; whose prayers were ardent and to the point. Two fragments will bear quoting. When the British fleet, under Lord Howe, was reported off the coast, meditating a descent on Boston, he prayed that

TRINITY CHURCH

God "would put a bit in their mouths, and jerk them about, send a strong northeast gale, and dash them to pieces on Cohasset Rock." Again, in a season of great anxiety, he prayed that God would let the Redcoats return to the land whence they came, "for thou knowest, O Lord, that their room is better than their company." Aaron Bancroft (father of George Bancroft, the historian) will be mentioned, who

THE OLD FENNO HOUSE, 1704

startled the parish with his Arian beliefs; Peter Crane, gunmaker by trade, whose granddaughter, Margaret Fuller, later Marchioness D'Ossoli, began her brilliant career by writing Latin verses at the age of eight. The dignified Elijah Dunbar, who taught the first singing-school, was prominent in founding the first musical society and the first library (for the good of the public) in the country. But matters musical in Canton demand far more than passing notice. Rev. Theron Brown says "the ancient town of Stoughton, which included the present Canton, was the cradle of New England psalmody," and in 1786 "the old Stoughton Musical Society, the earliest in New England and the harbinger of the Boston Handel and Haydn Society," was organized. Its first president, Elijah Dunbar, had learned to read music while in Harvard College. A dozen years after he formed his singing class, William Billings, who was destined to become the leading musical director and organizer of his day in America, had a flourishing school. And when the "Stoughton Collection" was published in 1828, Canton names were frequent in the index of authors. It was Mr. James Bazin

of Canton who, among many curious and wonderful things, invented the pocket pitch pipe about 1800. When Peter Lyon "set the psalm," a larger, clumsy implement was used. Harmony is not always found in and about the singing-seats—thus we hear of personal prejudices arising over certain hymns selected; read of elderly parishioners stalking out of church when the unhallowed sounds of flute and bass viol were heard.

THE OLD-TIME TOWN HALL, LONG SINCE REPLACED BY A FINE MODERN BRICK BUILDING

Many of the "sings" were held at the different taverns, Endicott's, Vose's, May's, Capen's, Belcher's, the Eagle Inn and the old Cherry Tavern. But chief interest centers about Doty's Tavern, presided over by genial Colonel Tom Doty, who was in 1760 landlord of Lamb's Tavern in Boston (situated on the exact spot on which the Adams House now stands). At the time of the Revolution Doty was master of the house which was to make "Canton prominent in the affairs of the province," for in this ancient, gambrel-roofed, big-chimneyed dwelling "was held the first meeting in the Province of Massachusetts Bay to oppose the tyranny of Great Britain." The late D. V. T. Huntoon says, in his excellent history of Canton: "The Doty Tavern, where the delegates from the several towns and districts in Suffolk first met, and from which place they adjourned to meet at the house of Richard Woodward at Dedham, and finally at the house of Daniel Vose of Milton, where the memorable 'Suffolk Resolves' were passed —was built in early days. A mar-

quis slept beneath its roof; a general planned within its walls the freedom of a nation; and a destined president of the United States, John Adams, baited his horse there. There was no stagedriver so ig-

REV. BRADLEY GILMAN
CLASSMATE OF PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

norant as not to know where Doty's Tavern was. He it was who kept the best viands, and could mix the best glass of grog of any landlord in all the country around. His inn was the centre of gossip; around his capacious hearth were wont to congregate on winter evenings the village wiseacres, to discuss over pipe and bowl questions pertaining to town and province." This valued landmark was burned some fifteen years ago to the great sorrow of antiquarians.

The Suffolk Resolves, drafted there by General Warren and finally passed, were carried to Philadelphia by Paul Revere where they were approved by the Continental Congress. It was not long before hostilities were rife 'twixt royal troops and patriots, and the great revolutionary struggle was inaugurated. Paul Revere had learned the goldsmith's trade in his father's shop after leaving school. *He was clever with the pencil, skilful with the graving tool and artistic in his tastes, and speedily made a name for design and workmanship in gold and silverware of every description. The cups, the spoons, the pitchers, the mugs, the pots, the kettles and other things which he designed and made are among the most beautiful

MRS. REBECCA FOSTER GILMAN

and precious heirlooms now standing on the sideboards of old New England families. He taught himself the art of copperplate engraving, and then, fired by the political heat of the time, as the crisis of the

* From The Bell's Own Story, by Rev. Edward Abbot

Revolution drew near, he became a cartoonist. He was the Thomas Nast—the "Judge"—the Opper—of his day. . . . The next step to drawing political cartoons in ridicule of George the Third and his agents in America was to take up active service in the cause of colonial independence. He joined the Sons of Liberty. He became a confidential bearer of dispatches to

THE ELDERS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

New York, Philadelphia and other points of importance. . . . On one of his messenger visits to Philadelphia he studied up the structure and operation of powder mills, and before the Revolution was fairly under way was experimenting in the casting of cannon. . . . He was the armor-plate contractor of his day, and rolled thirty thousand pounds of sheet copper for the gunships which were ordered by the government after the Revolution; and he furnished the brass and copper work for the famous frigate "Constitution." In 1801 he became a summer resident of Canton, and, having bought "the old government powder mill property on the east branch of the Neponset River, established a copper rolling mill and foundry for casting bells and cannon. From one foundry or the other, and from his hands, came the sheets of shining metal with which the dome of the (Massachusetts) State House was coppered." Business of the Revere Copper Company in Canton was conducted by him or by some lineal descendant for an entire century, lacking a few months. The little wooden house in which he lived still stands and

among his relatives may be found the original Stuart and Copley portraits of Revere and his wife, pieces of his colonial furniture, and such interesting documents as the account of his midnight ride,—in his own handwriting; an order for military equipments from Benedict Arnold (when the latter was in good standing) and a letter from Robert Fulton ordering sheets of copper for his steamboats.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY THOMAS E. GROVER

It was to Canton that the distinguished military hero, Richard Gridley, had retired at the age of sixty-two, to spend the remainder of his life in country quiet. He had commanded His Majesty's army at the siege of Louisburg, had fought by the side of Wolfe at Quebec, but his sympathies and convictions were with the patriots and he stepped once more into service as Major General and Chief Engineer of the Patriot army. His private and public career were enviable and a handsome monument in his memory has been erected by the citizens of Canton. Huntoon eulogized him as "one of the most distinguished military characters of New England,—renowned for personal bravery, a skilled artillerist, a scientific engineer, a prominent actor in the great events of our country's history."

Canton is the birthplace of Commodore John Downes, courteous gentleman and a bright star in the United States naval service, whose dying words, "I am ready," were fitting for one who had devoted his whole life to the service of his country, one who had never been found inattentive to her calls.

In 1797 the town of Stoughton was divided and, strangely enough,

THE LATE JESSE FENNO

the older and longer established part did not retain the old name, but at the suggestion of Elijah Dunbar accepted the not very distinctive one of Canton, and its first representative to the Great and

General Court was Elijah Crane, afterwards Major General of the First Division of the Massachusetts militia.

Transportation is no small question in a new country. Silas Kinsley was the pioneer in transporting luggage before the days of railroads and his son, Rufus Bent Kinsley, was the founder of the Kinsley Express, which was afterwards consolidated with the Adams Express.

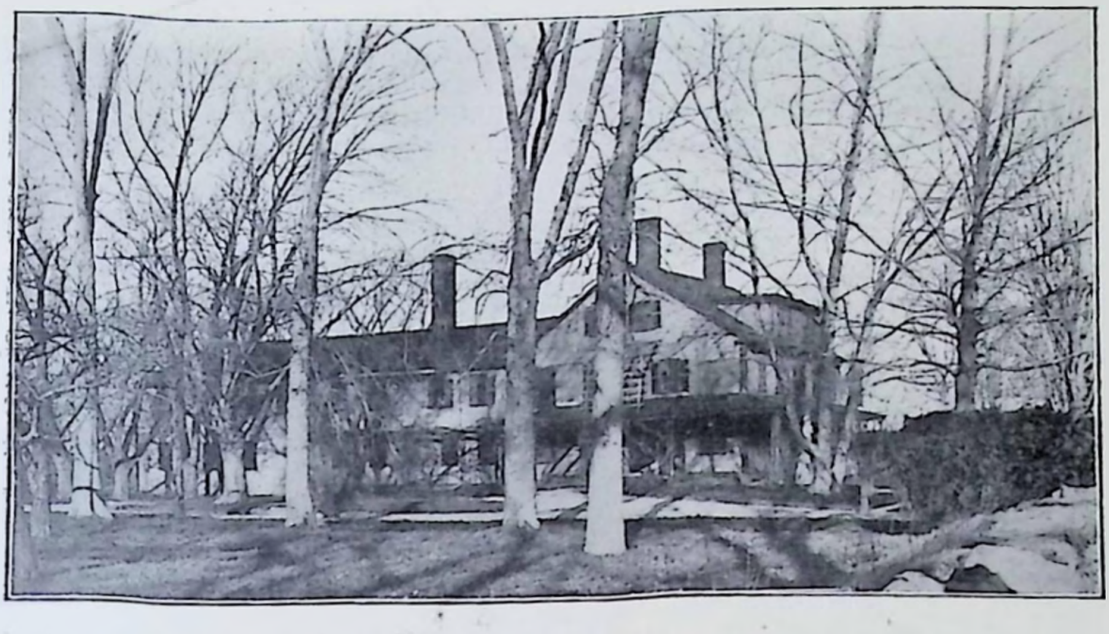
KANTON KAMERA KLUB DOING "FIELD WORK"

Convenient water power has always made Canton a manufacturing centre. Iron implements, steel, copper, cotton, silk, wool, yarn were all made many years ago in this locality. Most of the enterprises of fifty and a hundred years ago are still carried on and the whirr of machinery can be heard on every side, while tall chimneys tower above the buildings at intervals, their ascending smoke marking the spots of prominent industries.

The Kinsley Iron and Machine Company, established in 1787 by Leonard & Kinsley, where muskets were made for the government in 1812, is yet in active operation and employs nearly three hundred people.

The Eureka Silk Manufacturing Company, is not only one of the largest but one of the most successful of its kind in the country. Started nearly seventy years ago, its output steadily increases, and its dyeing department always holds the attention of visitors who are interested in the nicety of colorings.

A visit to the fine brick building on Chapman street of the Knitted Mattress Company will reveal the fact that they are kept busy filling



CHERRY TAVERN, A FAMOUS OLD TIME HOSTELRY

orders for hotels, asylums, hospitals and sleeping cars, for their stuffed beds are known to be thoroughly hygienic. An item of interest regarding the padding for tables and stairs made in this establishment is that they are the only textile fabric in the world in which the woof is not twisted.

THE DOTY TAVERN, BIRTHPLACE OF THE SUFFOLK RESOLVES

The first braided fishing lines in the United States were made in Canton by Mr. George Mansfield,

who is yet manufacturing them. The mill is in a beautiful spot not far from the Sharon line.

The Draper Brothers Company have not only a finely equipped plant as to spindles, mules, cards and knitting machines but a one hundred and fifty horse power Harris and Corliss engine and dynamo which can supply five hundred lights. For two or three generations the Drapers have been engaged in Canton manufactures. It was in 1851 that James Draper of Melbourne, England, who had settled with his family in Canton, organized with his brother Thomas, who had previously manufactured knit goods in Chelsea, Massachusetts, the manufacturing of woolen goods. Later, James Draper became associated with George Fred Sumner and this partnership lasted some fifteen years. After the death of Mr. Draper and the consequent dissolution of this firm, Mr. Draper's children continued business at the old Canton Mills at the corner, while Mr. Sumner went into business for himself. The latter has been identified with the commercial, ecclesiastical and musical life of the place during his long and busy life and is a mine of information on matters historical.

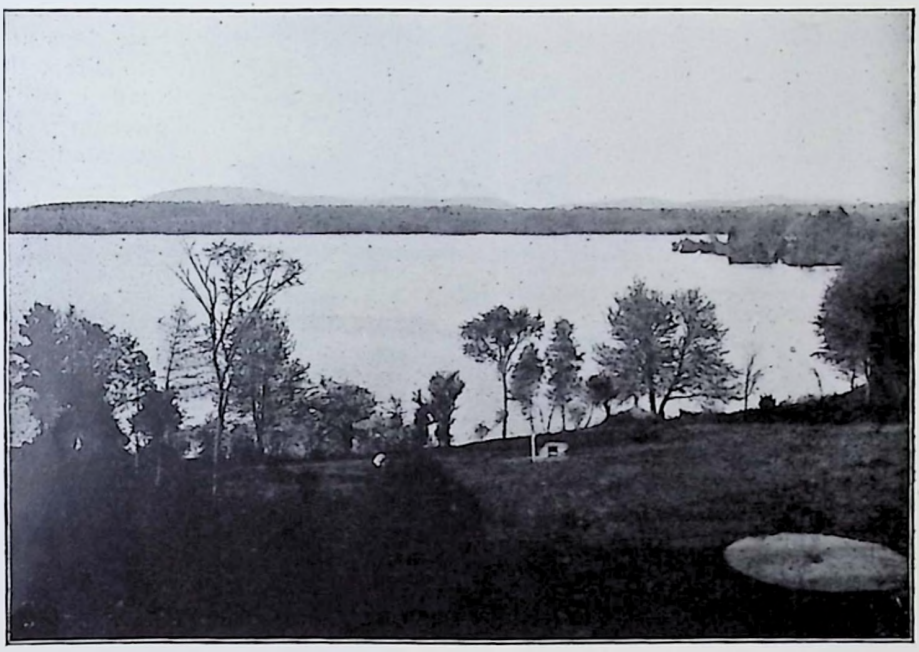
PONKAPOG POND

The box factory gives employment to many hands and the pay roll is distributed for the most part among resident workers. Mr. Francis Dunbar, its proprietor, has served the town many times as selectman and was recently appointed postmaster.

Khaki cloth is made by the Springdale Finishing Company. Canvas from the mills is here dyed

to make uniforms for the government contracts. The coloring process is intricate and delicate, somewhat like the developing of photographs, so many solutions and dryings and steamings must the canvas pass ere it reaches the proper condition to resist the hot sun, rain and dust which would otherwise cause it to fade. Heavy orders were filled here for the Japanese government in the late war.

lic-spirited citizen, an eloquent speaker and a vigorous advocate of all good causes. He gave the land on which the town hall stands, was always generous in public benefactions, was a communicant and an ardent supporter of the Orthodox Church. Since his death the Rising Sun works have been carried on with equal energy and business acumen by his eldest son, Abner Morse.



VIEW FROM WAMPATUCK COUNTRY CLUB

The Rising Sun stove polish manufactory—the largest in the world—was founded by Hon. Elijah A. Morse, whose death some years ago was a great loss to the town. He established the business as a young man and by indomitable energy and keen insight built it up rapidly to its present size and prosperity. Mr. Morse was a very pub-

The Canton "Journal," Horatio L. Cate editor and proprietor, boasts a long and honorable career. Founded in 1876, it has always stood for the best interests of the town and has had the loyal support of its citizens. E. B. Thorndike was for many years its editor and later P. M. Leavitt was associated with him in its business interests. In

1893 Mr. Leavitt become sole proprietor and editor, continuing thus until a year or so ago. Canton receives all the great city dailies still damp from the press, yet the local sheet has a flavor all its own and,

THE LATE HON. ELIJAH MORSE, M. C.

locally at least, vies with its greater rivals in uniqueness and interest.

"The old stone viaduct," over which the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroad passes on its way to Providence, was one of the wonders of its day and is still pointed out as a fine example of engineering skill. Built of granite in 1834, it is not merely a thing of beauty but has remained in perfect condition all these years, during which it has been subjected to diverse tests never dreamed of by its makers. Intended only for a single track, it has yet stood the extra demands of modern traffic without even the starting of mortar. And who were the men who left such creditable work behind them? William Gibbs McNeill, a graduate of West Point, later a Major General in Rhode Island at the time of Dorr's Rebellion, was the chief engineer, while none other than Major George Washington Whistler (father of the late noted artist) —the lovable, talented civil engineer who stood always first in his drawing class at West Point, and whose ability to render music on the flute brought him the nickname of "Pipes," was assistant and consulting engineer. West Point graduates were scarce in those days and Whistler was sent for to direct the building of the railroad between Moscow and St. Petersburg, for which labor he was decorated with the order of St. Anne.

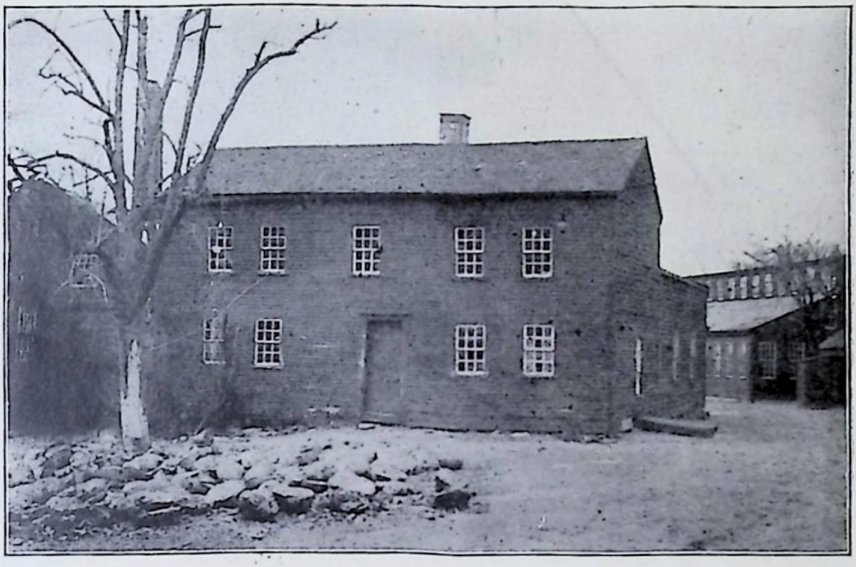
Some years ago Canton lost a

OLIVER S. CHAPMAN

deeply beloved citizen in the person of Mr. Oliver Chapman. Generous with his time, energy and purse, seeking only the good of the town, this man worked constantly to further all enterprises which benefited

the residents. Most especially did he labor toward the embellishment of the cemetery where there is scarcely a rod which does not show the result of his personal care and good judgment. No sketch of Canton would be complete without more than passing reference to this cemetery whose beauty has made it renowned throughout the state. In addition to its natural advantages the people have made it a matter of special pride to enhance all these. Benjamin Huntoon, a beloved old-time pastor and progressive citizen, was like Mr. Chapman, tireless in his efforts to arouse interest and obtain appropriations. General Dearborn of Roxbury, who laid out the cemeteries at Mount Auburn and Forest Hills, evidenced here, once more, his good taste and skill.

One of the oldest houses, which is always regarded with interest by visitors, is the "Fenno House," built in 1704 by John Fenno, an ancestor of Jesse Fenno, who died recently at the age of eighty-three, beneath the roof which had sheltered his kin for over two hundred years. Mr. Fenno had served on the school committee for more than fifty years. A famous story-teller, of cheery disposition, he was a favorite with young and old.

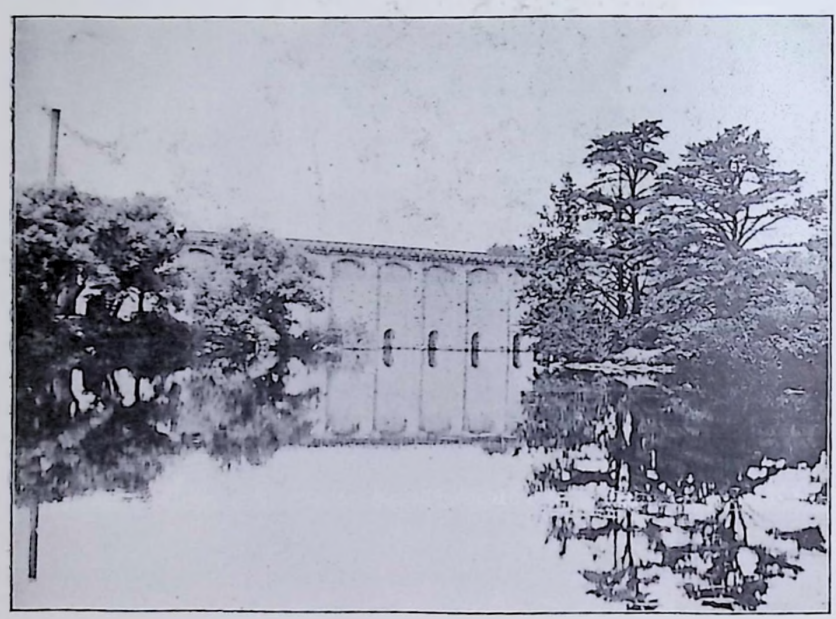


THE OLD PAUL REVERE HOUSE

One of Canton's most popular and honored institutions of recent origin is the Wampatuck Country Club, which was founded in 1900 and now owns nearly eighty acres in one of the town's most beautiful situations. A three thousand dollar clubhouse on the brow of a noble hill overlooking a lake and a most entrancing view, a fine six hole golf course, tennis courts, trap shooting, canoeing and woodland walks and drives amid sylvan solitudes are

some of the privileges which its members enjoy. The club's membership is a most democratic one, all citizens of the town, male or female being eligible; it has a considerable waiting list and is in a very prosperous condition. Among the founders of the club were Charles H. Eager, Thomas B. Draper, Walter S. Draper, Joel M. Bense, Willis Shepard, James S. Perkins, J. Danforth Dunbar and Herbert L. Fenno. Herbert L. Fenno is its present president and Benjamin Morse its secretary.

Another Canton club of note is the Kanton Kamera Klub, which "considers first, sociability; second, discussion of topics of the day; third, photography." That the last is by no means a negligible quantity is evidenced by the fact that the club has in its archives many hundred splendid photographs taken by its members all over the world, among which may be found all the historic and beautiful spots in its home town. Most of the illustrations which accompany this article are the product of this club. Mr. Frederic Endicott, for many years its president, is also an enthusiastic member of the Appalachian Club and has climbed and photographed most New England peaks of note. During his busy life as a civil engineer Mr. Endicott has yet found time to render service in positions of trust and honor in his native town. He served for many years as its superintendent of schools and introduced many wise measures in the various grades. His brother, the late William Endicott, was a



THE OLD STONE VIADUCT, BUILT BY THE FATHER OF THE ARTIST, WHISTLER

valued instructor in the Boston schools during almost all his life and the Endicott School near Franklin Park takes its name in his honor. The Endicott name is one which has been honored in Canton since its very earliest history. The late Hon. Charles Endicott is spoken of by many residents as a man who in his long life did much for the town, a singularly able orator, a wise counsellor, a man learned in the law and a dignified official in the capacities of state treasurer and tax commissioner.

The picturesque old stone mill below the viaduct, known locally as "the old stone factory," is now occupied by the Neponset Woolen Company, makers of carriage cloths. Half a century ago it was a cotton mill of good size for those days, and it marks the entrance of the Wattles name into Canton annals, a name that has ever since been prominent in town affairs. The Wattles interest in the old stone mill has passed, but L. R. Wattles & Company now do a thriving business in the manufacture of sizing for cotton yarns at Canton Junction, and Mr. Joseph W. Wattles has been and is still active in the promotion of Canton's interests. He was a tactful and vigorous worker for the establishment of the Blue Hill Street Railway, the Coöperative Bank, and the Canton Junction postoffice. Mr. Wattles has been several times chairman of the board of selectmen, and a member of the state legislature where he was prominent in the committee on banking.

Governor Guild has lately honored Judge Thomas E. Grover with the appointment of district attorney for Norfolk county. He has honored Norfolk county, too, say the Canton people who have known the Judge all his life. Judge Grover was for many years trial justice in Canton and his is a familiar figure as chairman of the republican town committee and moderator of the town meetings, where his fairness and wisdom have made him acceptable to all parties. He is known far and wide as an able and learned lawyer, a wit and a story-teller, and a man of literary tastes. His pleasant home has been the scene of many literary and musical gatherings, for Mrs. Grover is an accomplished musician.

At the Unitarian parsonage on Chapman street one meets in the persons of the successful clergyman and his wife authors as well. Mrs. Rebecca Foster Gilman has published two books and writes on varied topics for magazines and papers. Five or six popular volumes bear the name of Bradley Gilman as author on their title pages. Mr. Gilman has written many exceptionally clever short stories, more of which are continually in demand among leading editors and publishers.

And so one might go on with the people of the present day as with those of the past and find a long list of names which deserve mention as being those of men and women who are widely known in literature, art, politics, finance and philanthropy, who have done and are doing much toward the upbuilding of the community. Perhaps I have mentioned enough to show the type and need only add that these are representative names, chosen somewhat at random from many equally deserving.

It is not possible in the scope of a magazine article to more than

touch on the historic interest and the present day advantages of a place like this, an ancient yet modern town, teeming with New England life. Yet if some day a reader would learn more, would fain make a pilgrimage through a country of marvelous variety and beauty, let him seek the region of which I have spoken and if he finds, fortunately, the same affable hosts and charming story-tellers which the writer did, he will soon lose himself in the glamour of the events described, and will understand why the shoulders square and the tones become vibrant with affection and pride, when the long roll of honor for Canton is called.

PONKAPOG POND-LILIES